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Short Cuts to Hot Meals

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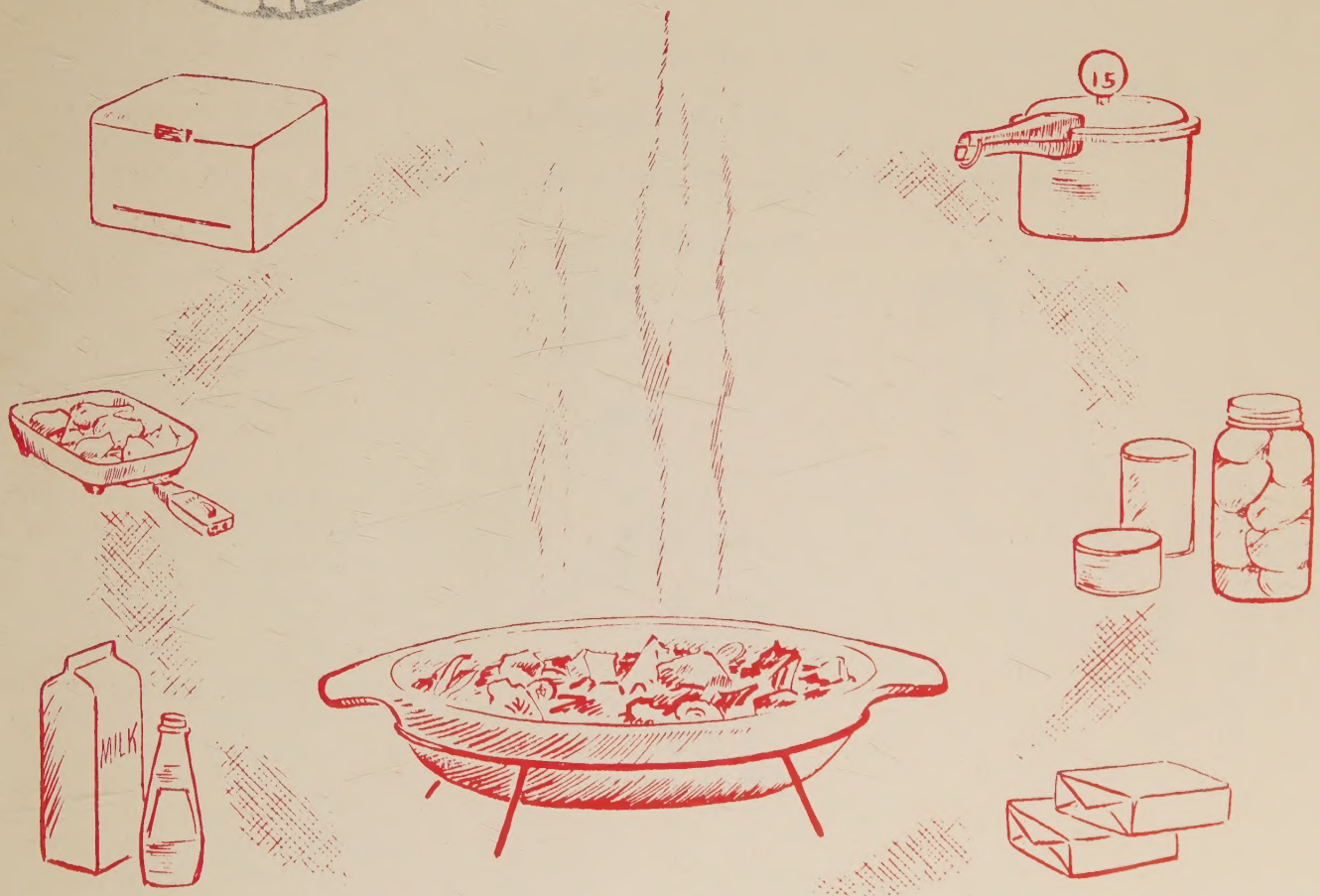

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Short Cuts to Hot Meals

FAMILIES SHOULD EAT TOGETHER

Family mealtimes are important social events. They may be the only time of day the whole family is together. This should be a time to share news, events of the day, and plans for the future. Without this time together, some of the sense of belonging to a family is lost.

A recent survey of 4,000 families showed that these Americans ate together. On the days surveyed 97% of the evening meals were served with all family members present. Common sense tells us this did not "just happen." Working mothers hurried home, children cut off play activities, and fathers waited more or less patiently for the last person to arrive home. In some cases the meal was probably "kept warm" until the last member slammed the door!

Feeding families today when each person has separate activities is not easy. Homemakers need to encourage as many as possible to eat together. But they must also manage to feed the family member who for some good reason cannot eat with the rest of the family. This circular attempts to give some practical answers to some of the typical mealtime problems faced by the modern homemaker.

Coping with family activities and time schedules takes thought and planning. Adjust the serving time of meals so as many as possible will be present when the meal is served. If you are a working mother, plan a realistic dinner hour. Allow a few minutes of family talk before starting food preparation. Or better still, start the meal, then let the oven or electric frypan do the work while you and the family relax. Make family mealtime cooperation a habit--youngsters setting table, husband supervising the children's washup, you superintending kitchen preparations.

When it is impossible for all members of the family to eat together, streamline your planning and meal preparation so you need not spend all your time in the kitchen. Some concrete timesaving suggestions are found in this circular.

YOUR PLAN OF ACTION

Serve Nutritious, Tasty Meals

To serve the family foods they need in a form they like without long tedious preparation time--that's the goal of the modern homemaker. Cutting corners in preparation time is valuable when the shortcuts do not cause loss of important minerals and vitamins. For instance--carrots can be peeled early for they contribute Vitamin A, a vitamin not easily lost in water or by contact with air. Vitamin C, however, is easily lost. Therefore, cabbage shredded for slaw will have more food value if done at the last minute.

In general food value is saved if:

Foods are kept covered and cool

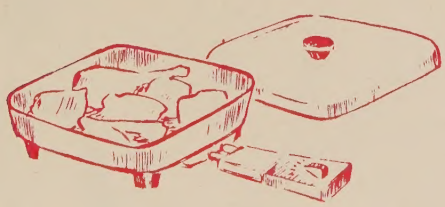
Rinsed quickly but not soaked in water

Not overcooked

Don't shortchange your family's nutrition to save time.

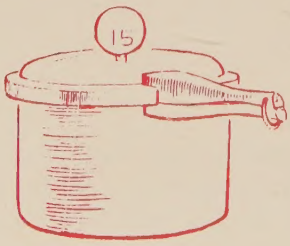
USE YOUR EQUIPMENT

Thermostatically-controlled equipment keeps food in good condition if dinner is delayed.



Electric frypans are useful for holding meats that can cook for a long time at the simmer range. Purchase the lid even if it costs extra so that foods will be kept moist. Serve right from the skillet to save extra dishes. The insulated feet let it sit on the family table.

Use the deep fat fryer as a controlled-heat saucepan. Stews, chowders, soups, and chili hold well in these kettles.



Pressure saucepans should be kept handy. If you have gotten out of the habit of using these timesavers, rediscover their convenience.

If you don't use the automatic timer on your oven, you have missed much of the built-in convenience you paid for. Simple directions came with the range. If you have lost your instruction book, request another from the store. Usually three settings are necessary--the total number of hours that the food is to cook, the time that food should be done, and the temperature at which you wish it cooked. Practice using the timer when you are home until you are sure you can set it correctly. Then plan meals to be out of the oven when you arrive home--from work, shopping, or just from an afternoon of fun.

A word of caution, however. Do not leave protein foods in oven without heat for over four hours. Noon is soon enough to take meat from refrigerator for an oven-cooked meal.

PRACTICE CORE PLANNING

The era of the weekly menu plan has all but gone. RAPID CHANGES IN FAMILY PLANS make detailed menu planning impractical. The new look in food selection lies in CORE PLANNING. This flexible method of stocking the larder simply means buying enough of a variety of foods to mix and match later as individual meals are planned.

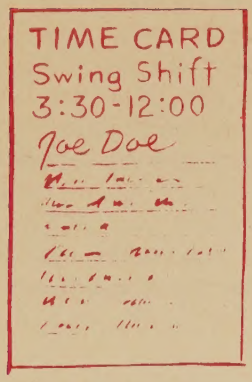
You never plan menus? Are you sure? Even musing at the meat counter--"I need meat for four days...the lunch meat is gone, and Jim promised the kids a weiner roast"--is a form of menu planning. Core planning--choosing sufficient meat, eggs, fruits, and vegetables to last till the next scheduled shopping, and replacing staples and cereal products--insures handy supplies when your family living schedule makes it needed.

Core planning requires that attention be given to selecting the majority of foods for their nutrition as well as taste appeal. Choose foods from the four food groups--meat and eggs, milk products, cereals, and citrus and Vitamin A, rich-green and yellow vegetables. Meals using these foods, provided they have been stored and cooked correctly, will supply the family's nutritional needs.

LET'S BE SPECIFIC!

Here are some typical family meal situations with suggestions for coping with the problems they bring:

When Shift Work Creates Problems



"All I get done is cooking," wails the wife whose husband begins his work day in the midafternoon. It is a problem! Meals for the husband and preschool children are no problem. But the school children are not home when father leaves for work. Don't slip into the habit of feeding these young people "just a sandwich" instead of a well-planned evening meal. It is very easy when you have already cooked one major meal. But this routine will never build good food habits in youngsters. Often their diet will be low in Vitamins A and C because vegetables and fruits will not be served regularly. Protein supplies will be low and iron intake under par unless regular well-planned dinners containing meat, fruits, vegetables, and milk are the rule.

Most wives of shift workers find it best to serve meals where the major work is done only once--before the first shift eats. For instance:

Menu

Meat Loaf
Browned potatoes Broccoli
Tossed salad
Gingerbread

Plan of Action

1. Prepare meat loaf mixture. Mold enough for the first shift, place in pan, and bake. Refrigerate the rest in pan ready to bake for the rest of the family.
2. Scrub potatoes for all. Cook. Peel those for early meal and cool others quickly. Put peeled potatoes into oven with loaf to brown. Refrigerate others.
3. Prepare the whole head of broccoli, cooking what is needed and refrigerating the rest. Or cook only that part of frozen package needed and return the remaining to the freezer.
4. Prepare salad greens for all. Store those not needed in plastic bag and refrigerate.
5. Bake enough gingerbread for all.

Using this method, all the preparation is done at one time--most of the garbage can be handled at once. Kitchen time for the second main meal is kept at a minimum. Put the meat loaf into the oven, peel and add the potatoes half an hour before serving time, cook the broccoli on top of the stove, add the salad dressing to salad, dish up dessert, and call the children.

Here's another example of making use of the broiler for a split-shift dinner.

Menu

Broiled ham slices
Candied sweet potatoes
Green beans
Fruit salad
Cookies and ice cream

Here's How

1. Cut slices of smoked ready-to-eat ham or shoulder for father's meal.
2. Open canned yams or use boiled and peeled fresh ones. Place father's portion on a small aluminum pan. Add brown sugar, butter, and one tablespoon frozen concentrated orange juice. Heat on broiler pan along with the meat.
3. Cook frozen green beans in salted water on top of range. Add pinch of mint or other seasoning just before serving.
4. Serve salad or pear halves, pineapple rings, peach slices. Use fruits in season or good buys for the time of year. Choose citrus fruits often. Or broil grapefruit with the meat.
5. Ice cream and cookies require only dishing up.
6. When cleaning up, wipe off the broiler surface while still hot. Put the small pan in which potatoes were glazed to soak. Stack the dishes to be washed after the evening meal. The broiler can be used again, since the sugar glaze was in the small pan.

When time to feed the rest of the family, add more ham to the broiler. After turning the ham slice, add the yams directly to the broiler and drizzle the glaze over the meat and vegetable. Cook the rest of the beans on the top of stove, repeat the salad.

Have you some favorite tricks to share?

When Time Is Short

More and more mothers are holding down two jobs--homemaking and a paying position outside the home. Those who remain seem busier than ever trying to do extra community work. Which homemaker hasn't sometime overstayed her time--shopped too long or been delayed in reaching home? If you need to serve dinner in a twinkling, better have a mental plan of attack. You won't have time to search for a quickie menu if the family is already washing!

If speed is essential, rely on cans and packages. Rediscover the value of canned foods. Great strides have been made in canning techniques. Some folks have gotten into the freezer habit and haven't kept up with the grocery shelf, too. Have available staples like canned roast beef, corned beef, pressed meats, tuna, and other seafood products, chicken--both whole and canned pieces. Canned soups make a quick sauce; frozen ones are a deluxe casserole ingredient. Have you tried cream of celery or French onion soup in place of the traditional cream of mushroom or chicken? Use dry onion soup mix for a quick flavor treat. Canned gravy stretches leftover meat. Both chicken and beef gravy are available. Add flavor by using a bit of liquid smoke or hot sauce. Keep bread crumbs handy or substitute crisp dry cereal flakes. Avoid the sweetened ones! Desserts can be simple--fresh or canned fruit and cookies. Try sundaes of ice cream and crushed pineapple. Apricot jam makes a delightful topping. Instant puddings offer many possibilities.

Here are some quickie menus that have proved popular. The recipes for the asterisk (*) items can be found in the back of the circular.

Menu

* Canned Chicken Delight
Green beans Instant mashed potatoes
Lettuce wedges and French dressing
Bread and butter
Canned peaches and cookies
Coffee, tea, and milk

Here's how:

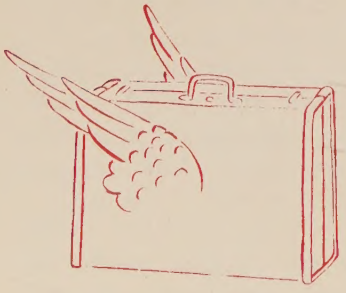
Mix this tasty "heat and eat" casserole, slip under broiler to brown if time permits. Follow the directions for instant mashed potatoes. Heat beans, adding a pinch of favorite herb for accent. Open peaches, cut lettuce wedges, and top with dressing. Make instant tea or coffee. Pour milk. If your family helper has the table set, you can serve the meal in less than 15 minutes.

Menu

Tangerine glazed ham loaf
Paprika potatoes Green lima beans
Apple salad
Instant pudding

Select a small canned ham or pressed ham luncheon meat. Open and cut into half-inch thick lengthwise slices. Place meat in shallow pan. Leave one end for potatoes. Drizzle lightly with undiluted tangerine juice (or concentrated pineapple juice), place under broiler, four inches from heat. Broil on one side, turn. Meanwhile, melt one tablespoon butter in small skillet, add one tablespoon dry onion flakes and one teaspoon paprika. Open and drain two cans of small whole potatoes. Add to skillet and stir gently. Line reserved area in meat pan with aluminum foil. Add potatoes and complete browning. Make salad. Make pudding as directed. Add bits of peppermint candy canes to pep up vanilla pudding. Or add one teaspoon of instant coffee to chocolate pudding for a mocha chocolate treat.

When You're Out of Town



Don't feel guilty when you leave the family occasionally for a convention, a PTA training session, or just a good visit at home. A little preplanning and stocking of the refrigerator and freezer will see the family through meal preparations in record style. Plan the day's meals in detail. And WRITE DOWN ALL OF THE DETAILS. Most families find that they get along fine except:

"Mom forgot to say that the oven thermostat wasn't working so the casserole was too brown."

"The meat was too frozen to pry apart." (You didn't say to take it from the freezer before I went to school.)

"The sauce for the casserole was too runny." (How was I to know that you use condensed soup undiluted?)

It's surprising how many details we simply take for granted. Do a dry run of the menu with the elected cook--let him or her repeat it back to you. Be sure to note the questions. Then answer them on paper. Make the note personal--as if you were talking. Here's part of an example letter, detailed enough to instruct the very inexperienced person:

Hi Sue,
Here are your menus for the day

Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
Scrambled eggs	Sue and Jim - School	Baked Swiss Steak
Toast and jam	Dad - downtown	Frozen green peas
Orange juice		Baked potato
Coffee or milk		Relish tray
		Bread and Butter
		Strawberry sundaes

Breakfast

Start the coffee first. Measure 4 cups water into pot. Add two measures (or your favorite amount) of coffee. Put small flat top on coffee basket. Put on top of pot and plug in. Set the table, using the green placemats. Dilute the orange juice with 3 cans of water. Get out the medium sized skillet — the one with the burned handle. Add 1 tablespoon butter and put on medium heat of small front burner. Break 6 eggs into the green bowl. Add ⅓ cup milk and beat with the egg beater till all mixed. Add ½ teaspoon salt Add mixture to skillet and stir constantly. I use the big fat spatula. Take Jim's out early — he likes them soft. Finish your's and Dad's. Make the toast as you are cooking the eggs.

Obviously, most children capable of cooking at all will be more at home in the kitchen than this outline indicates. But often a note in such detail will give confidence that is badly needed in such a new experience.

When "They Will Be Here Any Minute"

Perhaps the most difficult situations to cope with are those caused by unexpected delays. If the family isn't there--and you have had no phone call to say they will be delayed--you hesitate to eat. Have a family policy about delays. For instance, "We'll wait 15 minutes and then eat." Most food will hold well for 15 minutes. Encourage regular mealtimes. Many farmers have one very bad practice! They insist on continuing work until dark when harvesting or doing other work that seems extremely pressing. Delaying the evening meal until dark doesn't save time because body efficiency is lowered.

Plan meals to be ready to eat at a specific, set time. It takes only a few minutes to eat if the food is on the table. Or if the fields are too far away, take the food to the workers. Many foods carry well. Simplicity--two portions of one tasty dish rather than one portion of two--will ease the packing and planning of this type meal. Keep your basket packed with plates, silverware, condiments, etc.; then "field food" is little trouble. Pack the food in a cardboard box--insulating it with thick newspaper wraps--fill a thermos with cold milk and another with fresh coffee--and take off to the field where the family can eat outdoors at a reasonable time of day. Several suggestions for foods that can be carried to the field, a church potluck, or the annual PTA dinner--are listed among the recipes on the pages that follow.

"KEEP IT WARM" FOODS

What about that urge to "just keep it warm?" Sometimes this is most practical. Most times it is the easiest way to handle family mealtimes where members eat over a three-hour period. But usually it is not the best way if you want high quality and nutritious foods. Let's consider the foods that hold well. Soups, stews, and juicy meat mixtures are all very good holders. Some foods actually improve with low temperature cooking. For instance, Boston-baked beans are a satisfying dish that can be ready in the oven on a help-yourself basis. If you use generous amounts of ham in the beans, you will have a nutritious protein dish with lots of taste appeal.

Most meat roasts can be held at a low roasting temperature without much loss of quality. However, it is not recommended that meat or mixed dishes containing meat, cheese, milk, or other protein foods be kept at simmer temperatures for long periods of time.

The fastest bacterial growth takes place between the temperatures of 130° and 160°. This may be just the temperature of your "keep it warm" food. Any food can be kept hot but few foods should be!

DO NOT HOLD

1. Foods that lose flavor and texture. Vegetables from the cabbage family quickly develop strong flavors when overcooked. Leafy vegetables go extra limp if held; broccoli and asparagus turn a discouraged brown if held too long.

2. Foods that separate when waiting. Some meat sauces--those with rich gravy, cream sauce, or sour cream--are likely to separate when held at serving temperature too long. It is better to cool and reheat these foods.

3. Dinners that you know will be delayed at least an hour. It may be more trouble, but you will have better quality, more nutritious food if you cool and reheat the dinner. Save a few dishes by cooling in the container you'll use for reheating. A double boiler, a baking dish, or the family broiler may all be used. Set in running water to cool quickly. Reheat over boiling water, under the broiler, or on top of the stove.

COOKING FOR THE FAMILY THAT EATS AT DIFFERENT TIMES IS A PART OF MODERN HOMEMAKING. IT CAN BE A CHORE OR AN INTERESTING CHALLENGE--THE CHOICE IS UP TO YOU.

RECIPES

Chicken Delight

1 pint (or 2 small jars) canned chicken
1 can chicken gravy or 1 can cream of chicken soup
1 small can mushroom stems and ends
1 cup pineapple bits, drained
1/2 cup slivered almonds

Open and drain mushrooms and pineapple. Mix chicken, mushrooms, pineapple, and gravy. If time permits, bake in 350° oven for 30 minutes. If not, heat on top of stove, stirring constantly. Garnish with almonds. Serve on macaroni, noodles, or rice. Shoestring potatoes or Chinese noodles make a pleasant variety. Serves 4-6.

Chinese Tuna Casserole

1 can chunk style tuna fish
1 No. 2 can Chinese noodles
1 can cream of celery soup, 1 soup can water
1 cup chopped celery, cooked
1 tablespoon chopped green pepper (optional)
1 tablespoon chopped onion (optional)
1 tablespoon butter

If making ahead: saute onion, pepper, and celery in butter until they soften slightly. Add 2 tablespoons water, cover and simmer until just tender.

Arrange layer of noodles, tuna, and vegetables. Repeat. Dilute soup with water. Pour over casserole and refrigerate. Bake at 350° for 1/2 hour.

For a real quickie: substitute 1 can mixed Chinese chop suey vegetables, well-drained, for celery, pepper, and onion. Canned water chestnuts add a crisp note.

Corned Beef Bake

1 can corned beef, shredded
1 No. 303 can whole kernel corn, drained
1 can cream of chicken soup, 1/2 cup milk
1/4 cup chopped onion
1/4 cup chopped celery
1 tablespoon butter
1 cup cheese bread crumbs

Break corned beef into bite-size pieces. Chop onions and celery. Saute in 1 tablespoon butter until onion is limp. Mix with beef and corn. Place in 1 1/2 quart casserole, add soup diluted with milk, and bake at 350° for 1/2 hour. Top with cheese crumbs and heat till brown.

Cheese crumbs: sprinkle grated cheese on dry bread crumbs, bake, stirring often until cheese melts. Do not brown.

Busy Day Hint: combine all ingredients except the soup and refrigerate. When preparing, stir milk into soup, add to casserole. Bake. Heating the soup will speed dinner.

STOCK THE FREEZER WITH THESE HANDY MEAL MAKERS

Brown Meat Cubes

3 pounds--cubes of lean beef or venison
3 tablespoons fat
flour, salt and pepper
1 cup water

Heat fat in large skillet (electric frypan is excellent). Season flour with salt and pepper. Place in paper bag and add meat cubes, few at a time, shaking well. Brown meat cubes in fat. Add water, lower heat to simmer, and cook till meat is tender.

Cool quickly by spreading 1 layer thin on large pan. Package in amounts needed for your family, usually pints or quarts. Freeze.

Suggestions for use:

1. Prethaw meat cubes, add cooked carrots, potatoes, other vegetables for meat pie.
2. Heat, add sour cream just before serving on quick cooking rice.
3. Add tomato sauce, catsup, or chili sauce; serve over spaghetti, or other paste product.

Spaghetti Freezer Sauce

1/3 cup salad oil
3 minced cloves garlic
3 chopped green peppers (optional)
3 large sliced onions
3 pounds chuck, ground
2 cups boiling water
4 8-ounce cans tomato sauce
3 6-ounce cans tomato paste (2 cups)
1 tablespoon salt
1 tablespoon paprika
1 teaspoon celery salt
1 teaspoon garlic salt (less if desired)
1 teaspoon chili powder
2 tablespoons Worchestershire
3 tablespoons chili sauce

In hot oil in large kettle, cook garlic, peppers, and onions 5 minutes. Add meat; cook over high heat until all red color disappears. Add water, rest of ingredients; simmer, uncovered, 2 hours. Cool quickly. Freeze in 1-pint freezer containers. Makes 7 pints.

To thaw: place container under hot water long enough so that contents will slip out. Or let container stand at room temperature several hours. Then heat sauce in double boiler.

Note: it is easier and quicker to freeze only the sauce. Cook the macaroni, spaghetti, or noodles fresh each time for best quality.

Most favorite casseroles and meat mixtures freeze well. Remember too:

1. Freeze them slightly undercooked.
2. Avoid excessive fat in the sauces to be frozen.
3. Plan to use them within a month.
4. Package in small blocks or separated layers for quick, uniform reheating.
5. Avoid freezing hard cooked eggs, raw celery, fresh tomatoes, large chunks of potato, excess spices.

FREEZER FAVORITES

Chicken a la King

1/2 cup chicken fat, butter or margarine
6 tablespoons chopped green pepper
3 cups canned mushrooms
3/4 cup sifted all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons salt
3 cups chicken broth
3 cups milk
6 tablespoons finely cut pimento
3 pints diced cooked chicken

Melt the fat and cook green pepper and mushrooms in it about 5 minutes. Blend in the flour and salt, then add broth and milk. Cook until thickened, stirring constantly. Add pimento and chicken. Blend well. Yield: 16 portions, 3/4 cup each.

To serve immediately: Heat the mixture thoroughly and serve on biscuits, hot buttered toast, or in timbales.

To freeze: Cool the food quickly. Pack in freezer containers, leaving head space. (Pint containers are preferable to larger ones because large blocks of chicken a la king are difficult to thaw.) Seal and freeze immediately.

To prepare for serving: Without thawing, heat frozen chicken a la king in the top of a double boiler, about 30 minutes for 1 pint.

Spicy Swiss Steak

1/4 cup flour
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
2 pounds 1/2 inch thick round steak
3 tablespoons shortening
1 cup catsup
1/2 cup water
1 medium onion, sliced thin
1 lemon, sliced thin
1 green pepper, sliced
5 whole cloves

Combine flour, salt, and pepper, pound into steak. Melt shortening in skillet and brown steak. Place in baking dish. Blend catsup and water; pour around steak and add onion, lemon, green pepper, and cloves. Cover with aluminum foil--place on lower oven rack. Bake 1 hour at 350°. Makes 6 servings.

Lamb Riblets

(This inexpensive dish will bring compliments.
Fixed this way it is not excessively greasy--
the normal complaint for lamb ribs.)

3 pounds lamb riblets, cut into halves.

Have butcher cut the lamb ribs in half. Cut into individual servings. Place ribs on rack in shallow pan and bake in 450° oven until brown on one side. Pour off fat, turn, and brown on other side. Pour off fat.

Cover meat with favorite barbecue sauce and bake until tender--about 2 hours at 350°.

FOODS TO TOTE

Potluck Beef

(Makes enough for two families of hearty eaters--a favorite at community suppers)

2 pounds ground beef
2-3 onions, chopped
2 green peppers, chopped
6-8 stalks celery, cut in 1" pieces
1 package (large) Lasangne noodles
1 can condensed tomato soup
2 teaspoons salt
1 can tomato sauce
1 can tomato paste
1 can mushroom soup
1 small jar stuffed green olives, sliced
1/2 pound sharp cheese, grated

Brown meat in 1 tablespoon fat. Cook the noodles in boiling water until just tender. Combine all ingredients, reserving some cheese for topping if desired. Place in large casserole dish and bake for 1 hour at 350°.

Spaghetti and Meatballs

(This is a favorite recipe of an Albany 4-H cook. You'll enjoy the different flavor of this rich tomato sauce.)

For meatballs combine:

2 pounds hamburger
1 pound sausage
2 large onions, chopped fine
2 eggs
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon pepper

Form into small meatballs and brown well in 2 tablespoons fat. Add 5 whole cloves and 1 clove garlic to fat and cook with meatballs on low heat for 5 minutes. Remove meatballs, garlic, and cloves. Measure fat. Return 1/4 cup fat to the skillet. Add:

2 cans tomato paste
3 cans tomato sauce
3 cups tomato juice
2 cups water

Allow to simmer and thicken for 1 hour. Add the meatballs and simmer another hour. Serve on cooked spaghetti or rice. If desired, one 8-ounce package of spaghetti can be cooked and added directly to the meatballs. Cole slaw, thick pieces of French bread, and a fruit dessert make this a "toting" favorite.

Beef and Biscuits

2 cups flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
5 tablespoons shortening
1 large pimento, chopped fine
3/4 cup milk

Sift flour, baking powder, salt. Cut in shortening, add pimento. Add milk, mix well, and knead to form biscuit dough. Divide into two parts. With one half, line the bottom of 9 x 14 baking dish. Roll and cut the other half into biscuits to top the dish.

Meat Mixture:

2 tablespoons fat
1 pound ground beef
2 cups canned tomatoes
2 cups whole kernel corn
1 teaspoon chili powder
4 tablespoons butter
5 tablespoons flour
1/2 teaspoon sugar
salt to taste

Melt butter in frying pan. Set aside in small bowl. Heat fat in frying pan. Fry meat until brown. Add corn and tomatoes. Stir the flour into the melted butter to form a paste. Add slowly to meat mixture, stirring constantly until mixture thickens slightly. Add chili powder, salt, and sugar. Pour mixture on top of biscuit lining, top with remaining biscuits and bake in 425° oven for 30 minutes. Serves 6-8 generously. This is good with gelatin fruit salad, relish plate, or apple waldorf.

Lamb Stew

2 pounds lamb shoulder
6 carrots
6 potatoes
2 onions
1 cup green beans
1 cup tomato juice or water
salt and pepper to taste

Cut the lamb into small cubes. Place on rack in shallow pan and bake in 450° oven until brown on one side. Pour off fat that accumulates. Turn meat and brown on other side. Transfer to deep kettle, add tomato juice. Bring to boiling point, reduce heat, and simmer. Add vegetables and simmer until both meat and vegetables are just tender. If planning to "tote," remove from heat, pack in newspaper to keep warm. If the vegetables are slightly undercooked, they will finish cooking while traveling.

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